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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on part of a larger research study on the reasons for the shortage of minority students entering colleges of education and the teaching profession. Interviews were conducted with 140 teachers of color in three urban school districts: Cincinnati (Ohio), Seattle (Washington), and Long Beach (California). The focus of this part of the research was the personal motivations of the informants for selecting teaching as a career. Recurring themes emerged from the responses that need to be explored and better understood if the profession hopes to attract and retain teachers of color in the future. Major themes include influence of other people, involvement with youth, and being called to the profession. Most respondents claim to have gone into teaching due to someone else's influence: their family, a friend, or a teacher. Additional reasons given include: making a difference, teaching as a calling, love of children, previous involvement with youth, love of subject matter, vacation benefits, and love of teaching. Teaching was a second career choice for more than half the respondents. Some became teachers after trying another career while others were discouraged or unable to pursue other careers due to poverty, sexism, racism, or lack of adequate preparation. Factors such as vocational mission, community service, and personal commitment to communities of color attract people of color to the teaching profession, retain them in the field, and offset disincentives or the lack of external incentives. (Contains 11 references.) (ND)

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WHY DID YOU SELECT TEACHING AS A CAREER?: TEACHERS OF COLOR TELL THEIR STORIES.

The choice of teaching as a career and the persistence through the process culminating in a teaching position result from a complex and highly varied array of influences upon the individual. The present research is based on the notion that by understanding the career motivations of current teachers of color we might gain insight into the reasons for the shortage of students of color in the teaching profession. The research for this paper relies upon the perceptions of teachers of color to identify the relative importance and the specific forms of motives for choosing and continuing careers in teaching. In addition, the informants discuss conditions and attitudes which impeded their choices, as well as how they circumvented these impediments.

This paper is a part of a larger research project which inquires, in a variety of ways, into the reasons for the shortage of minority students entering colleges of education and hence the teaching profession (Gordon, 1992). Over a two-year period I conducted face to face, semi-structured interviews with one hundred and forty teachers of color in three urban school districts: Cincinnati, Ohio, Seattle, Washington, and Long Beach, California. Six basic questions brought a wealth of information which, if consolidated into one article, would lose integrity and depth. For this reason I am focusing on only one of the questions at this time: **Why did you select teaching as a career?** The remaining five interview questions included:

One. Why do you think students of color are not going into teaching?

Three. Do you recommend teaching to others? Why, why not?

Four. Are teachers respected in your community? Has the image of teachers changed over time in your community?

Five. How can we attract and recruit more students of color into the field of teaching?

Six. What changes would you make in the teacher training experience to better prepare **all** teachers to work with students from diverse economic, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds?

The responses to these questions have been and will be discussed in other articles (Gordon, 1993).

In this part of the research, I was interested in the personal motivations of the informants for selecting teaching as a career, not their perceptions or assumptions about others. The responses to this question required the teachers to examine their own lives and their attitudes towards the teaching profession. It should be noted that this was the second question in the series of six and followed the question: why do you think students of color are not entering the field of teaching? The order of the questions was important. I knew that it would take at least five minutes to establish trust and my credibility. I also realized that we all tend to respond to interview questions in an off-handed manner, often in a way that perpetuates stereotypes and mythologies. Perhaps this is a product of the "sound bite" generation or simply to protect our privacy. Nevertheless, once the interviews moved from the flippancy of expounding on the motivations of others in Question One to the personal

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ruminations of Question Two, the entire tone of the interview changed. In fact, many teachers expressed discomfort to suddenly be asked, "Well then, why did you decide to enter teaching?" especially if they had just lambasted the profession when citing reasons why today's youth are not entering the field. With few exceptions, a visible and audible shift occurred and then the stories began. So profound was this change that before the end of the interview, most informants had changed their responses to the first question. In other words, once they realized that I truly cared about finding solutions, and not just answers to a set of questions, their confidence level increased and they spoke their minds candidly.

One must remember that this is not comparative research. I intentionally interviewed only teachers of color. My data are based solely on responses from teachers who are identified by their employing school district as belonging to one of four federally defined ethnic groups used for official reporting: Latino/Hispanic, African American/Black, Asian American, and Native American. In this study the term "minority teacher" and "teacher of color" are used interchangeable since there are regional preferences among the informants themselves. This also holds true for the pairs of terms: Latino/Hispanic, Black/African American, and Native American/Indian.

FINDINGS

Most of the individuals interviewed in this study claim to have gone into teaching due to someone else's influence: their family, a friend, or a teacher. Over one half of the informants attributed their entering teaching to having come from a strong family. Out of this group more than one third came from what they called "a family of educators." A teacher's influence was noted by a little less than one half of all the informants as a major reason for their entering the field. This influence was not always positive. In fact, one third of the informants who were strongly influenced by a teacher in their career choice had had a negative experience with this teacher. They selected teaching because they felt that they could do a better job than the teachers who had taught them.

One fourth of the informants entered teaching "to make a difference." An additional fifteen percent claimed that they were "called" to the profession. Another fifteen percent stated that they decided on teaching because of their love of children or a desire to work with people. Twelve percent said that their previous involvement with youth through jobs or volunteer associations influenced their career choice. Additional factors which affected the decision to become a teacher included love of the subject (seven percent), love of teaching (seven percent), vacation benefits (five percent) and love of learning (three percent). Fifteen percent of the informants made this decision very early in life or always knew that they would be teachers. Others were not so enthusiastic about the profession at first. In fact, more than one-half of the informants indicated that they either wanted, or tried, to enter another profession. A variety of factors steered them towards teaching.

INFORMANT RESPONSES

Influence of others.

Family Influence. As I began categorizing the responses under "family influence," I realized that the term meant different things to different people. After sorting and resorting, I decided to divide the responses under "family" into two areas, those who came from a "family of educators" and those who spoke of having "strong families."

Family of educators. Some powerful stories emerged from individuals who spoke of coming from a "family of educators." About one-fourth of the total number of informants identified themselves as such. While this may come as little surprise to many African Americans familiar with the elevated position of teachers in the South prior to desegregation, the same held true for teachers from other cultures where teaching was in high esteem. An East Indian male teacher told of his grandmother who had her own school, "In 1945 when independence came, she got into education. In 1955 she worked with Indira Ghandi before Ghandi became prime minister." (106)[1] A Latina who has been educated at the Sorbonne and is currently working on her Ph.D., spoke with pride of her father, "My father was a French teacher at the university in Cuba; he was also a publisher. He spoke five languages." (35) So does she.

A young Vietnamese American male teacher struggling with his anger at the discrimination he feels from other "minorities" as well as from Anglos, explained his commitment to teaching, "My dad was a teacher before he went into the [Vietnamese] army. He taught my uncles. The feedback was so positive, it stayed with me." (32) An African American woman who is fourth-generation college educated, a rarity in this country no matter what racial group one claims as their heritage, shared a wedge of her background, "We're from Arkansas. Great granddad was a doctor. One of my grandfathers was also a doctor; the other was a professor of English at a university. All of their children began in education. The women went into counseling and teaching. Men went into the military and moved up the ranks. I knew I was always expected to go to college." (78) A Japanese American woman spoke with passion of her father's influence on her decision to be a teacher. He had been interned during World War II and the family lost all their worldly possessions.

> My father encouraged me. He said no one can take away your degree; it is your ticket to equality. He felt very strongly about education because he had suffered so much in WWII in Hawaii. He saw Hawaii being run by Caucasians because of their connections. Education spoke for itself. I used to watch my father correct homework at night at home and I would sit next to him and do the same. (75)

An African American teacher who sings with a professional opera company stated, "If it hadn't been for my mom, I never would have stayed [in teaching]. My mother was a teacher. She was an amazing role model for me. She made teaching look so easy. I didn't have any special program; my mother was my program." (76)

Strong families. It became obvious that those who identified themselves as coming from "strong families" were not necessarily speaking of a family of educators, which usually translated into middle class. In fact, most of the individuals quoted in this section were from lower income homes. Strength in this sense indicated families who pulled together during hardships, who had a religious orientation, and/or who were involved in the community. Over one third of the informants stated that they came from such families. When we combine those who identified themselves as "a family of educators" with those who saw their families as "strong", we can see a pattern of the importance of family in the decision-making process of minority youth.

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[1] Numbers in parentheses without p. correspond to numbers in a Master List of Informants.

We are given a glimpse of some of these "strong families" in the following statements. Speaking from the depths of a Black Southern experience, one woman remembered, "My father didn't want us to work in the fields all our lives. He was a sharecropper, he picked cotton. There were ten kids in the family; all except one is [college] educated." (39) A mixed-race male teacher only three months out of college attributed his selection of teaching to his mother who is Jewish, "She stressed values of looking out for the common good, not forgetting the lower classes." (20) An African American woman, who attributed her success to her strong religious faith, demonstrated that poverty and illiteracy are not in themselves impediments to learning, "My parents encouraged [me even though] they didn't know how to fill out forms." (69) The next quote is from another African American woman who is a reading specialist. No doubt such a decision was based on the influence of her father. "My parents wanted us to have an education. My father pushed us into teaching; all three of us are teachers. My dad was illiterate, but brilliant, he just couldn't read. My mom only had a fourth grade education." (71) A Native American young woman who is currently working on her teaching certificate after completing a law degree was amazed by her parents' ability to overlook their own negative schooling experiences and see the value in their daughter's advancement. "Both my parents wanted me to be a teacher even though they had bad boarding school experiences." (108) An African American male who was raised in a single parent home in the "projects" is a model for those who feel that there is little hope left for young black males. He commented, "As a black male I was a B student. As I got older, I got better. My mother instilled pride and self-respect. I knew I could do better." (62) He is now a history teacher at an elite high school and is pursuing his Ph.D. in history. He says he has no intention of leaving the classroom he just wants to keep abreast in his profession. His wife is also a teacher.

Friend's influence. The influence of a friend or a friend's parents were also strong determining factors in a student's choice of careers. One African American male who lost both of his parents early in life and was uncertain about his future found guidance from others outside his immediate family, "People supported me throughout my education. My closest friend's parents were teachers, Mr. & Mrs. Allen; they were in recreation." (104) He is a now a coach. A teacher, originally from Panama, was confused about what to do with her bilingual talents, "A friend insisted that I use my two languages. I started taking Spanish classes and moved into teaching this way. To be Black and to be teaching Spanish is important and rare. I provide a role model they don't often see." (18) One informant stated simply, "I had a role model: he was the man next door." (39)

As related in these three quotes from African American women whose lives were transformed through the support of others outside their families. "A woman took an interest in me [at XX] and helped me through, Mrs. Bauer. She was a graduate of the school and funded my way through." (41) "I was mentored by a woman. I baby-sat for her; she lent me money. She had been the first woman graduate in economics from the school. I couldn't have made it without her help." (50) "When I was in college, I was interviewed by a man who encouraged me. He got me a job that summer for the school board. I then began teaching the next year at a junior high school. There were no Blacks there, and only one Black teacher. Two Black brothers from a farm were the first to integrate the school." (58)

Teacher's positive influence. While families and friends supported and encouraged many interviewees, it was often a special teacher that inspired them, as revealed in this statement: "Kids become teachers because of a particularly strong and influential teacher in their lives." (103) I was amazed at the degree of detail with which the images of past teachers could be recalled. Ironically, the older the informant, the more clear the memory and the names of these heroes who had transformed their lives. I will share just a few. An African American art teacher confessed, "It was a teacher who influenced me. He changed my life. Five others from the same art class became teachers. This man has impacted many kids." (37) A Black woman who has outstanding credentials and chose to teach in one of the toughest inner city schools revealed that her major in college was Classics. When inquiring further into her reasons for choosing teaching as the forum for this training she explained, "It was Mrs. Levy, an English teacher [in the tenth grade]. She read Canterbury Tales to us in Middle English and I was turned on. I wanted to do that. Chaucer sounded like music." (41) The next two teachers reflected on their beginning love affair with history, "My eleventh grade history teacher inspired me. I later student-taught with him. We are still in contact and I tell him how much he affected my life." (62) Another reported, "I fell in love with history in the tenth grade due to a wonderful teacher. She made it come alive. She modeled for me." (33) The following speaker, an African American male, was blessed with several great teachers who guided him through school. So great was his admiration for these individuals that he majored in all three of the subjects that they taught.

> I had teachers in Chicago who really inspired me. A coach, Dig Back, played for Chicago Bears. I also had a music teacher who had graduated from Grambling. He toured us around and told all the parents that he would get his music kids into college if the parents would support his effort. Then I had a great math teacher in algebra, freshman year. He made it so interesting, people thought I was his pet. I wanted to be like him, so I majored in math as well. (59)

Teacher's negative influence. There were also the negative experiences that inspired some of the informants to go into teaching. It is a sad commentary on teaching that some of our current teachers have had to struggle against members of their own profession to get where they are today. For these informants the negative experiences were examples of neglect, racism and discouragement. A sample of the neglect was echoed in this Latina teacher's voice, "I always wanted to be a teacher because all my teachers were so bad. I had all old teachers who fell asleep. I wanted to do a better job. I knew I would do it differently." (7) One informant commented on how a teacher's assistance could have made a difference in her life, but no help came. She had to do it on her own. "I felt I was not a strong reader when I was a child. I could have been closer to the top if someone would have identified and helped me. I went into reading [as a teaching specialty] in particular so I could help other kids like me." (65)

An African American informant was discouraged from going onto college by her academic counselor. It is interesting that this took place in a parochial school setting, given the excessive hoopla of today's political climate where excellence and equity are presumed outcomes of a private school education. She commented, "Nuns discouraged minorities from attending higher education. The counselor discouraged me from taking the SAT. The

negative inspiration helped; I went against the expectations of the school." (2) One vivacious and determined young Vietnamese American male teacher shared the pain of his early school experiences, "I came home and cried everyday because of language difficulties. I want to make it easier for others." (32)

The crime of poor teaching cannot be left at the doorsteps of public school teachers; there were many complaints about college professors. One Black male spoke of his experience, "In my sophomore year of observation, the teachers in the College of Education were so boring, I thought I would die. I knew I could do better, so I got interested. I thought to myself, 'History is relevant, we have to let them [the kids] see the importance of it.'" (60) A Native American man who returned for his certification at age forty two had almost given up on education, "I flunked out of college twenty years ago; I couldn't read, no comprehension." (36) Another Native male turned his frustration with the educational process into a "win" only to be defeated again. Then after much perseverance, he has become a strong leader and teacher for Indian children. He explained, "I had to drop out of college and began coaching. When my team started winning all the games, they fired me because they said I didn't have a teaching certificate to coach. I was so mad I went back to get a certificate. First at BYU, UW, and then WWU. It took me ten years." (109)

To make a difference. One fourth of all the informants claimed that they entered the profession to "make a difference." Some of the reasons were quite moving, "I want to help my community [Vietnamese] in overcoming hardships. I feel so good when I am helping students and changing their lives. I think all Vietnamese people have a huge responsibility in this country to help their people." (89) A Native American teacher commented, "I went on a sports scholarship to college. On all the applications I kept writing, 'I want to help my people', 'I want to help my people.' I dropped out of college; I couldn't make it. I wanted to be able to help other Native Americans." (109) An African American male confessed, "I knew I was not into this [profession] to become upper middle-class. You must have the desire to make a difference. I see this job as being a role model, to make changes for Black children." (17) One of the Japanese teachers concurred, "To be a teacher you must want to change people's lives; it's more than the status." (75) An African American woman contended, "You have to come back and pull others forward; I believe in the Harriet Tubman model."(26) Another woman contends, "I lift people up. I exude love. I work best where I am a helper. I'm making a difference." (43) With humble strength an older African American male teacher states, "I tell them, 'I want you to follow in my steps.'" (44)

Teaching as "a calling." Another one fourth of the teachers interviewed expressed a strong religious conviction and spoke in terms of teaching as their "calling." Often they could see little difference between their own family and their students' lives. One might assume that such feelings would arise more readily from women, but in fact it was about evenly distributed between genders. Men could just as easily evoke emotional feelings regarding their chosen vocation. Before slipping into another stereotype, it should also be noted that these were not only African American responses but were representative of all four ethnic groups. Listen to this array of comments: "I had a special calling, not everyone has this; for some it's just a job, but there is a big difference which shows up in how they treat

the kids." (53) "My strength is spiritual; I believe that I was brought here." (85) "I owe this to Jesus." (19) "Teaching is a gift, an individual thing, a gift from the Lord." (27) "I look at teaching as a service." (2) "Teaching is a talent. I'm gifted. I was born to teach." (14)

Love of children/people/teaching. A love of children, a desire to work with people, and a love of teaching were important factors which influenced many of the informants' decision to become teachers. These responses were significantly different from the ones which indicated the love of subject matter and the love of learning. Teaching means different things to different people as can be seen in some of these responses: "I love teaching. I love it. I love being in contact. I'm a good teacher. I think of them as my kids. Kids look to me as their mother." (56) "I like working with kids; you can be a kid yourself. You can make mistakes, and no one cares. They look up to you." (68) "Teachers are teachers because they want to be around people and kids." (63) "Art gives me a chance to talk to the whole child, to break it into parts not just lecture to them." (37)

Previous involvement with youth. Twelve percent of the informants didn't "get hooked" on teaching until they actually began working with kids. This took the form of Scouts, Upward Bound, teacher's aide, or other youth programs. One Latina claimed that the Girl Scouts made the biggest difference in her life. She reflected, "I got more training through the Scouts with professors and professionals, than I ever did from teacher training. Scouts are about making your community a better place. Kids don't have many opportunities to learn these skills in schools." (5) She is still actively involved in scouting. Another informant remembered, "When I was in ninth grade I tutored at my old elementary school. The Upward Bound program helped me a lot." (69) An elderly African American male sees community involvement as crucial to the development of a good teacher. He explained, "I've always been involved with youth, since 1957. I am co-founder of [XX] Youth Association. My eight and one-half years coaching and two and one-half years in a community agency enabled me to know how kids function in structured and unstructured systems." (88) Others became interested in teaching once in college. One Native American woman related her story,

> I changed my mind [to go into teaching] because of my work at the instructional center. I began tutoring others while I was being tutored myself. I realized I had something to offer and that I was good at tutoring. At the instructional center I was seen not as something quaint because I was a Native American but rather as a valuable resource. The College of Education could learn a lot from the instructional center. (77)

Another informant who had been discouraged by her parents from entering teaching began a Ph.D. program. While acting as a T.A. (teaching assistant) she "got hooked" and switched career paths. "I decided to do some student teaching to help me in my Ph.D. work and I got hooked, I really loved it." (38) It was not until she was placed in an elite prep school that she was able to convince her family that this was her true calling.

Love of subject matter. Three out of the six informants who indicated that it was the love of their subject that brought them into teaching were working in a language area, French or Spanish, and had been raised in these cultures. Other subject areas which brought teachers of color into the profession included the arts, theatre and music. One informant exuded, "I love performing; I love music. What was important for me [in selecting a career] was would I be able to do something that I like doing." (101)

Vacation benefits/love of learning. Only five informants responded that vacations and summers off were one of their reasons for selecting teaching as a career. One informant commented, "I wanted time off to raise my kids, so this is a good job." (55) And three noted the love of learning. One Latino explained, "I enjoy reading, learning something new. I used to read the encyclopedia and dictionaries. This seems to be a common characteristic in teachers; they like learning." (13)

Early career decision. There is often the assumption that children in the elementary years are too young to decide on future careers. My interviews suggested otherwise. Fifteen percent of the informants decided early on in life that they wanted to be a teacher or had that decision shaped for them by family members. These experiences are revealed in the following comments: "My fourth grade teacher turned me around, Ms. Fineberg; she made me realize I have potential." (61) "I had a black piano teacher as a child who I idealized." (47) "At three years old I knew I was going to be a teacher. You get a feeling earlier than you might think. Today, [young people] have no inkling of what they want to do or be." (95) "I began teaching at 46 years old but always wanted to be a teacher." (36)

Teaching as second career choice. More than one half of the informants (about sixty) professed that they originally wanted to be something other than a teacher. Out of this number, about twenty eight had the opportunity to try other careers prior to entering teaching. The remaining informants had their hopes dashed due to racism, sexism, poverty, or lack of adequate preparation. It appeared that those who did have a wider range of work experience were more aware of the benefits of teaching and had a different perspective on teaching. They valued their out-of-classroom experience and thought that it helped them to be better teachers.

Those who dreamed of another career. For the informants who dreamed of other careers, other lifestyles, and other challenges but were unable to fulfill their hopes, the most frequently mentioned career aspirations included medicine, nursing, coaching, professional music, acting, social work and law, in that order of frequency. The following two comments are from African American males. "Previously I had been premed. It was a struggle because I had no prior college preparation." (15) "I began in premed, but after one semester I switched to biology education." (39) The next are from five African American women. "I wanted to be a lab technician, but others said go into teaching because that's where intelligent Blacks work." (43) "I began as a medical tech student. After three years in college and one year in teaching hospital, I couldn't afford to live on my own so I kept on in school and switched to education." (58) "I wanted to be a medical social worker, to do outreach. My

family was poor so I couldn't take time and money for medical school. Where would I get the money for eight to ten years of education?" (83) "I originally wanted to be a social worker, but Black social workers were treated like clerks, while Whites got the real jobs." (26) "I wanted to be a dietitian in high school in [XX city] but a counselor told me I'd never make it, so I went into music." (74) And lastly a comment I heard from Native American, Latino, and African American males summarized in this quote, "I wanted to coach and knew you had to be a teacher to coach." (42)

Those who were blocked from other career choices. Some informants entered teaching not because it was their first or second choice but because other avenues were blocked for them. For these individuals it was either the only occupation open or a perceived "last chance." A southern gentleman explained regretfully, "I had limited choices at that time; I went to school in the fifties. You were either a teacher, a doctor, or a minister." (26) Another conceded, "Blacks my age did what their fathers did. I wasn't exposed to other professions." (80) A younger African American male from a very different world in the North stated candidly, "I saw it as my last opportunity. I love learning and wanted an education but didn't know how to survive in college. I had failed at Shaw and didn't make it at Fisk or UC; I didn't know want to do. Then I was approached about this special program for inner city youth." (42)

Those who tried other jobs. Responses of teachers who first tried other professions but chose to come into teaching make a statement for the power of the profession. These informants had well-paying positions but, as they explained, they realized something was missing in their lives. Men, in particular, tend not to be encouraged or introduced to the possibility of teaching as a profession. The repercussions of such narrowness of vision are many: lack of male role models and authority figures, lack of diversity of perspectives, lowered status of the field, lack of acknowledgement of men's nurturing selves, and a skewed image of what it is to be a teacher. One Latino teacher commented, "After five years working as a team-leader at the [XX] Lab of Pathology I realized something was missing — kids. People usually go into lab work because they don't have people skills. I'm a people person. I always wanted to be a teacher but didn't think of K-12 teaching; no one ever introduced me to the idea." (86) An East Indian male stated, "After four years in engineering school and one year as an engineer, I didn't like it. I missed people. From an engineering viewpoint, I asked myself, 'why am I creating tools for people who don't know how to use the tools they already have?'" (106)

Some spoke of seeing through the materialism and superficiality of the corporate life such as these African American women related, "I had a career in television. I made a lot more money in T.V. but I wasn't happy. I love teaching." (16) "I worked in other fields and didn't like them: government and private industry. It's still a slug's job. I remember sitting at my desk waiting for five o'clock to come around. The prestige of private industry is pompous and fake, but I had to learn that. I also got into teaching because I was concerned about African American learning." (90)

Still others, while working in other jobs, came across youth who needed a helping hand. They realized that teaching was the most effective way of providing this assistance and

changed professions. As this young Black woman stated, "I was a tutor in LA, a drug-prevention counselor. I met gang members and felt it was because they were doing poorly in school, [that they joined gangs] because they didn't think it [school] was important." (107) Another related, "I had intended to go on for a Ph.D. While studying [for my doctorate], I worked at the university for a while and watched the freshmen come in without adequate preparation in art. I realized that they needed help." (38) A young Native American woman explained her situation, "I'm a lawyer by training. I have two degrees from UBC. I'm in the process of applying to get my teaching certificate. I think I can be more effective in the classroom." (108)

Assistance through special programs. Many of the informants, especially those from the North and West, went through special programs such as EOP (Equal Opportunity Program), MESTEP (Math English Science Teaching Education Program), or other inner city programs for minority youth. A few of the informants, especially those in the South, received assistance privately from individuals who cared about their survival and success as a teacher. The following comments illustrate the range of options which facilitated choice of teaching as a career. Some of these comments such as the first one make you aware of how mercurial career decisions might be on the one hand, and, on the other, how inadequate traditional recruiting strategies have been, particularly for people of color. In many of these examples it is the "word of mouth" approach, the reaching out in the community, that has proven successful. Some examples: "My brother-in-law said to us four guys one day who were hanging out on the street corner, 'There's this program at [XX], go check it out.' We all went, and we all became teachers. It was pure luck. I didn't know how it was going to happen, but I always knew I wanted to be a teacher." (94) "I went through a special program, COP, Career Opportunity Program, for inner city people. It took those who lived around the corner." (42) "I found out word-of-mouth from my sister that [XX] was recruiting minority teachers in 1968. It was a program for teachers going into inner city schools." (73) "The Educational Clearing House was set up to try to get the kids of LA off the streets and into colleges across the country. I was sent up here to Central Washington University." (105)

DISCUSSION

As suggested by my research, factors such as vocational mission, community service, and personal commitment to communities of color attract people of color to the teaching profession, retain them in the field, and offset disincentives or the lack of external incentives. As these factors are shared by nearly all persons who select teaching as a career, it is crucial to not overemphasize the importance of pay and prestige in the career decisions of students of color but rather to understand the meaning given to all factors within the cultural context of each potential teacher.

The thinking that underlies my research assumes that people of color who select teaching as a career are motivated by a desire to give back to their community and hence create meaning and a positive self-identity in their lives (Montero-Sieburth, 1989; Becum, et. al, 1989; LeBrasseur & Freak, 1982; and Williams, 1984). This is not to say that teachers in

general do not have strong service motivations. In fact, according to Andrew's (1983) research, the desire to make a contribution in an area of social need is one of the most frequently cited reasons for teachers in general entering the field of teaching. The second most important factor was "enjoyment of children," and the third "love of subject." Several years later Feistritzer's (1990) surveys indicated "desire to work with young people" first, and the "value or significance of education in society" second. The third most popular reason was "long summer vacations."

I am not arguing that there are distinct demarcation lines between the reasons that minority and majority teachers enter the profession; the complexity of class, race, language, immigrant status, and gender issues are too vast to be so simplistic. What I am claiming is that there are recurring themes which emerged from the responses of minority teachers which need to be explored and better understood if the profession hopes to attract and retain teachers of color in the future. The major themes include the influence of other people, involvement with youth, and being "called" to the profession.

My contention is that teachers of color, in spite of the numerous obstacles (Gordon, 1991) select teaching due to a desire to assist, support, and provide a model for their own people. This view is supported by Adair's (1984) research which claims that "Black teachers view themselves as ethically responsible for preparing black youth for leadership in the enhancement of the quality of life for black people" (p. 506). Perkins' (in Warren, 1989) research on the history of Blacks in teaching argues that Blacks' saw teaching not only as a meaningful career but as a position of power and status within the black community. She contends that Blacks taught out of a sense of duty and expressed the desire to devote their lives to teaching.

CONCLUSION

Exploring the reasons why teachers of color who are currently in the field selected this profession provides us with insights not only into their personal motivations but perhaps into those of potential teachers of color. While many of the informants' responses were contextualized based on social, political and economic factors no longer in place, such as segregated Southern school systems, the community support that segregation provided can be, and to some extent must be, emulated if we are ever to attract and retain students of color into education as a profession. It is necessary that we determine which aspects can be duplicated and which cannot. Given that many teachers of color claim that they have come from strong families, how can we assist in rebuilding these families and communities? If we assume that many people of color do have a desire to give back to their own people, then what opportunities are we providing for youth to perform socially valuable activities? Since "making a difference in a child's life" was a major motivation for the informants selecting teaching as a profession, what are the avenues to get youth into teaching-type situations early on in their education? The responses in this paper also might enable us to reevaluate the assumptions that what has deterred people of color from choosing teaching as a career is low income and low status of the profession. While these may be contributing factors, they are not dominant in the responses by these teachers.

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